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(Synopsis of Previous Chapters.)

CHAPTER I—John Gale is a trader at Flambeau, a rough outpost of civilization in Alaska. His daughter Neela is a beautiful young girl, generally believed to be a half breed, daughter of Gale and the Indian squaw Alluna, with whom he lives. Some hidden burden weighs continually on the trader's mind, and he views with apprehension the arrival of a squad of soldiers at Flambeau. "That means the law," he says uneasily to Neela, who has become acquainted with and admired by Lieutenant Burrell, commander of the soldiers. It becomes known that Napoleon Doret, an honest, faithful French Canadian employed by Gale, is deeply in love with Neela. One Runyon, a disolute gambler and "bad man," arrives at Flambeau by steamer and in a fight with Burrell is worsted and forced to leave the town. On the departing steamer's deck he menacingly says, "I will return to take a hand in the game." III—Doret gives Neela a handsome silk gown brought by him from Dawson City for her. Arrived in this, she meets Lieutenant Burrell, who falls madly in love with her, and he wonders if her blood is really tainted. Gale reassures that she is the illegitimate daughter of himself and the squaw. IV—Runyon returns with Ben Stark, a professional gambler and man-killer with plenty of money. Stark builds a saloon and dance hall at Flambeau. "No Creek" Lee discovers gold in a valley some miles distant, and Neela persuades Burrell to take her there and locate a claim for her, their trip requiring a day and a night in the forest.

(Continued)

The story did not interest the Canadian. His mind was in too great agitation to care for dead tales. His heart burned within him too fiercely, and he felt too great a desire to put his hands to work. As he watched Burrell and Runyon bend over the table looking at a little can of gold dust that Lee had taken from under his bunk his eyes grew red and bloodshot beneath his hat brim. Which one of the two would it be? he wondered. From the corner of his eye he saw Gale rise from Lee's bed, where he had stretched himself to smoke, and take his six shooter from his belt, then remove the knotted bandanna from his neck and begin to clean the gun, his head bowed over it earnestly, his face in the shadow. He had ever been a careful and methodical man, reflected Polson, and evidently would not go to sleep with his firearm in bad condition.

"Nobody imagined that Gaylord would cause trouble," Stark was saying, "for he didn't seem to be a jealous sort, just stupid and kind of heavy witted. But one night he took advantage of Bennett's absence and sneaked up to the house." The story teller paused, and Neela, who was under the spell of his recital, urged him on: "Yes, yes. What happened then? Go on!" But Stark stared gloomily at his hands and held his silence for a full minute, the tale appearing to have awakened more than a fleeting interest in him.

"It was one of the worst killings that ever happened in those parts," he continued. "Bennett came back to find his wife murdered and the kid gone." "Oh!" said the girl in a shocked voice. "Yes, there was a deuce of a time. The town rose up in a body, and we— you see, I happened to be there— we followed the man for weeks. We trailed him and the kid clear over into the Nevada desert, where we lost them."

"He died of thirst in the desert maybe, he and the little one." "That's what we thought at the time, but I've crossed his trail since then. No, Gaylord is alive today, and so is the girl. Some time we'll meet." His voice gave out, and he stared again at the floor.

"Couldn't the little girl be traced?" said Neela. "What was her name?" Stark made to speak, but the word was never uttered, for there came a deafening roar that caused Lee's candle to leap and flicker and the air inside the cabin to strike the occupants like a blow. Instantly there was confusion, and each man sprang to his feet, crying out affrightedly, for the noise had come with utter unexpectedness.

"My God, I've killed him!" cried Gale. And with one jump he cleared half the room and was beside Stark, while his revolver lay on the floor where he had been sitting. "What is it?" exclaimed Burrell. But there was no need to ask, for powder smoke was beginning to fill the room, and the trader's face gave answer. It was whiter than that of his daughter, who had crouched fearfully against the wall, and he shook like a man with ague. But Stark stood unshaken and more composed than any of them. Following the first bound from his chair, he had relaxed into his customary quiet. There had blazed up one momentary flash of suspicion

and anger, but it died straightway, for no man could have beheld the trader and not felt contrition. His condition was pitiable, and the sight of a strong man overcome is not pleasant. When it was seen that no harm had been done the others strove to make light of the accident.

"Get together, all of you! It's nothing to be excited over," said Stark. "How did it happen?" Runyon finally asked Gale, who had sunk limply upon the edge of the bunk, but when the old man undertook to answer his words were unintelligible, and he shook his head helplessly.

Stark laid his finger on the hole that the bullet had bored in the log close to where he was sitting and laughed. "Never mind, old man; it missed me by six inches. You know there never was a bullet that could kill me. I'm six shooter proof."

"What'd I tell you?" triumphantly ejaculated Lee to the lieutenant. Doret of all in the cabin had said nothing. Seated apart from the others, he had seen the affair from a distance, as it were, and now stepped to the bed to lay his hand on Gale's shoulder. "Brace up, John. Sacre bleu! Your face look lak flour. Come outside an' get it air."

Polson led his friend down the trail for half a mile without speaking till Gale had regained a grip of himself and muttered finally:

"I never did such a thing before, Polson; never in all my life." "Why?" insisted the Frenchman. "I—I—I— What do you mean?" "Don't lie wit' me, John. I'm happen to be watch you underneath! You bat w'en you turn roun' for see if anybody lookin'."

"I thought you were asleep," said Gale.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE KNIFE.

In every community, be it ever so small, there are undesirable fitzons, and while the little party was still at breakfast on the following morning three such members of society came around the cabin and let fall their packs, greeting the occupants boisterously.

"Well, well!" said Lee, coming to the door. "You're travelin' kind of early, ain't you?" "Yes, early and late," one of them laughed, while the other two sprawled about as if to rest.

"How far are you goin'?" "Not far," the spokesman answered. "We want a piece of this creek."

"What are you goin' to do with it?" "Cut that out, Lee. We're on." "Who wised you up to this?" inquired the miner angrily. "Never mind who put us Jerry. We're here, ain't we?"

The harm was done, and there was no use in concealment, so Lee reluctantly told them of his discovery and warned them of the stakes already placed. "I'll step along with the boys and show them where our upper stakes are," volunteered Stark, and Runyon offered to do the same, adding that it were best to make sure of no conflict so early in the game. The five disappeared into the woods, leaving the others at the cabin to make preparations for the homeward trip.

"I don't like the look of this," observed the lieutenant thoughtfully. "I'm afraid there's some kind of a job on foot." "There's nothing they can do," Gale answered. "We've got our ground staked out, and it's up to them to choose what's left."

They were nearly ready to set out for Flambeau when the five men returned. "Before you go," said Stark, "I think we'd better organize our mining club."



"My God, I've killed him!" cried Gale. "There are enough present to do it."

"We can make the kind of laws we want before the gang comes along," Runyon chimed in, "and elect a recorder who will give us a square deal." "I'll agree if we give Lee the job," said Gale. "It's coming to him as the discoverer, and I reckon the money will be handy, seeing the hard luck he's played in."

The group assembled in the cleared space before the cabin to make rules and regulations governing the district, for it is a custom in all mining sections removed from authority for the property holders thus to make local laws governing the size of claims, the amount of assessment work, the size of the recorder's fees, the character of those who may hold mines and such other questions as arise.

It was of wondrous interest to Neela to be an integral part of such important matters, and she took pride in voting on every question, but Burrell, who observed the proceedings from neutral ground, could not shake off the notion that all was not right. Things moved too smoothly. It looked as if there had been a rehearsal. Lee, Polson and the trader, however, seemed not to notice it.

The surprise came when they had completed the organization of the district and had nearly finished adopting bylaws.

Runyon moved the adoption of a rule that no women be allowed to locate mining claims, and one of the strangers seconded it. "What's that?" said Lee, raising his one eye from the notebook in which as secretary he was transcribing the minutes.

"It isn't right to let women in on a man's game," said Runyon.

"That's my idea," echoed the second.

"I suppose this is aimed at my girl," said Gale, springing to his feet. "I might have known you bums were up to some crooked work."

Polson likewise rose and ranged himself with the trader. "Ba gar, I don't stan' for dat!" said he excitedly. "You want for jump Neela's claims, eh?"

"As long as I'm chairman we'll have no rough work," declared Stark, glaring at them. "If you want trouble, you two, I reckon you can have it, but whether you do or not, the majority is going to rule, and we'll make what laws we want to."

He took no pains now to mask his dislike for Gale, who began to move toward him in his dogged, resolute way. Neela, observing them, hastened to her father's side, for that which she sensed in the bearing of both men quite overcame her indignation at this blow against herself.

"No, no; don't have any trouble!" she pleaded as she clung to the trader. "For my sake, daddy, sit down." Then she whispered fiercely into his ear: "Can't you see he's trying to make you fight? There's too many of them. Wait! Wait!"

Burrell attempted to speak, but Stark, who was presiding, turned upon him fiercely.

A moment later he saw the futility of interference when Stark continued, addressing the trader:

"This isn't aimed at you in particular, Gale, nor at your girl, for a motion to disqualify her isn't necessary. She isn't old enough to hold mining property."

"She's eighteen," declared the trader. "Not according to her story."

"Well, I can keep her claims for her till she gets of age." "We've just fixed it so you can't," grinned Runyon cunningly. "No man can hold more than one claim on a creek. You voted for that yourself."

Too late Gale saw the trick by which Stark had used him to rob his own daughter.

"No Creek" Lee had the name of a man slow in speech and action and



"No, no; don't have any trouble!" she pleaded. one who roused himself to anger deliberately, much as a serpent flings itself into a painful fury, but now it was apparent that he was boiling over, for he stammered and halted and blustered explosively:

"You're a bunch of rascals, all of you, tryin' to down a poor girl and get her ground. But who put you wise to this thing, in the first place? Who found this gold? Just because there's enough of you to vote that motion through that don't make it legal, not by a d—d sight, and it won't hold, because I won't write it in the book. You— you!" He glared at them malevolently, searching his mind for an epithet sufficiently vile and finding it, but it cut—"dressmaker!"

(To Be Continued)

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